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ABSTRACT

In light of the theory that student absenteeism and lack of motivation are intertwined, educators have begun to investigate the theories of motivation in order to apply them to creative attendance policies in an attempt to reduce the problem of student absenteeism. Motivational theories indicate common elements of the importance of the intrinsic sense of belonging and self-worth to motivation. Individuals need to feel a sense of achievement and are motivated by extrinsic acknowledgements of this achievement. School should be made relevant and interesting because bored workers will not produce high quality work. A good lead-manager will create a situation of cooperative action which will allow the students to satisfy their needs to belong and feel powerful. Schools should be designed to use competition and teamwork to achieve established goals. Just as in a free market system, this will result in a high level of production. A large suburban high school located in a fairly affluent area initiated an incentive-based program to reduce absenteeism, the Back-to-Class program. Students with perfect attendance are permitted to select their next year's teachers which allows them to see a purpose to their action and to benefit from it. A school-wide pizza party incentive was used to provide a sense of teamwork and cooperative action. The Back-to-Class program had phenomenal success raising the attendance rate by four percent. (ABL)

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Motivational Theories as Applied to Ways to Improve School Attendance of High School Students

Patti Person

March 17, 1990

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Abstract

This paper addresses the problems created by excessive school absenteeism in education today. A relationship is drawn between various motivational theories and ways to improve school attendance. Selected motivational theories are reviewed and then applied to one high school program designed to use motivation to reduce excessive absences. The results of this program after one year of implementation are given.

Motivational Theories as Applied to Ways To Improve School Attendance of High School Students

Absenteeism has reached crisis levels in many of the secondary schools across the nation. As these absences mount, the learning process in our classrooms is being constantly interrupted. The statistics related to school absenteeism are staggering. Each school day, 2,500,000 students are reported absent from school. The dropout rate is estimated at 27 percent nationally and over 45 percent in some cities. The 27 percent dropout rate equates to 65 bus loads of students who leave United States schools each week and do not return. In a year's time, 700,000 students will be lost, two years, the number will exceed one million. At this rate, only one half of the kindergarten class of 1988 will graduate from high school in the class of 2001 (Sklarz, 1989, p.33). Research has shown that excessive absenteeism is directly related to students dropping out of school (deJung and Duckworth, 1986).

In spite of the notoriety given to the proliferation of drugs, alcohol, and vandalism in the public schools, student truancy is the biggest

problem and by far the most costly in consumption and expense. In surveys conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals in 1973 and 1974, school administrators rated poor attendance as their "most perplexing student problem" by a ratio of two to one over discipline (Thompson and Standard, 1975, p.2). In a 1978 survey conducted by the NASSP, high school principals ranked student absenteeism and the lack of student motivation as the number one constraints facing them in carrying out job responsibilities (De Leonibus, 1978, p.1).

More perplexing than the problem of student absenteeism is the question of how to best deal with the problem. The National Commission on Excellence in Education recommended in A Nation at Risk that "attendance policies with clear incentives and sanctions should be used to reduce the amount of time lost through student absenteeism and tardiness" (U.S. Department of Education, 1983, p.27).

Hoback (1976) concludes in his research regarding the problem of student absenteeism that "a traditional, authoritarian approach to attendance problems cannot work in today's schools.

A successful attendance program needs to be based on positive reinforcement--making each student feel needed, wanted, and involved in his or her own education" (p.20).

In light of the theory that student absenteeism and lack of motivation are intertwined (De Leonibus, 1978), educators have begun to investigate the theories of motivation in order to apply then to creative attendance policies in an attempt to reduce the problem of student absenteeism. The following pages will include a survey of related motivational theories followed by an example of a successful attendance policy which utilizes key elements of the theories explained.

The definitions of motivation are as varied as the theories themselves. Ames (1990) describes motivation as "the intensity of behavior, the direction of behavior, and the duration of behavior" (p. 411). While Owens (1987), views motivation as being "made up of all those inner striving conditions described as wishes, desires, drives, etc. . . . it is an inner state that activates or moves individuals" (p. 92). Whatever the accepted definition may be, the importance of motivation in education cannot be denied. Terrell

H. Bell said it best by stating, "there are three things to remember about education. The first one is motivation. The second one is motivation. The third one is motivation" (Ames, 1990, p. 411).

Motivation is usually considered as being related to human needs which in turn motivate behavior. The classical management view of motivation is based on the belief that people need money, so if the employer pays them well, they will be motivated to work hard. Conversely, those who are lazy are penalized by receiving a lower pay rate. The premise behind this theory is that a carrot (incentive of extra pay) and a stick (penalty of lower pay) will motivate the worker to do the job well (Owens, 1987).

In the 1920's, a new element was introduced to the classical theory of motivation. The "Hawthorne studies" or the "Western Electric research" was conducted to determine how much illumination was required to achieve the maximum output from workers. It was discovered that each change of bulbs (an increase or a decrease in illumination) resulted in an increase in the level of worker output. The workers were responding to their perception of the expectations of the experiments

and not to the changes in physical environment. Therefore, they responded to psychological factors in addition to the classical factor of pay incentive. The Western Electric workers were motivated by the fact that they thought the experiment was fun and that they felt that their work was important and results were expected (Owens, 1987).

Maslow suggested that people are motivated by a hierarchy of needs. Once the lowest order of needs on the hierarchy is met, a higher-order need appears and the individual has a need to satisfy it (Owens, 1987, p. 97). The hierarchy of needs as used in Maslow's theory of motivation are as follows: basic physiological needs (food, water, shelter, etc.); security and safety; social affiliation; esteem; and self-actualization (p. 99). Maslow states that one will tend to behave in ways that are intended to produce the response in the organization that will best meet the desired needs (p. 98).

Herzberg expanded on Maslow's theory by creating his two-factor theory of motivation. He claims that motivation is not influenced by a single factor, but two separate, independent

factors:

1. Motivational factors, which can lead to job satisfaction, and
2. Maintenance factors, which must be sufficiently present in order for motivational factors to activate, and when they are not present, they can block motivation and can lead to job dissatisfaction (Owens, 1987, p.105).

Herzberg suggests that the opposite of job satisfaction is not job dissatisfaction, but rather no satisfaction. Therefore, by eliminating the sources of dissatisfaction, it does not mean that the workers will be motivated. Maintenance or 'hygiene' factors such as salary, working conditions, etc. do not serve as motivators to workers. Herzberg views intrinsic factors as achievement, advancement, responsibility, and recognition as being the motivators (satisfiers). In brief, people attribute motivational characteristics to themselves (intrinsic) and attribute dissatisfiers to characteristics of the organization (extrinsic) such as salary (Owens, 1987, p. 107). In comparison, Maslow views every

need as a potential motivator, while Herzberg states that only the high-order needs are true motivators.

Ames (1990) views motivation as a process aimed at creating motivational thought patterns that contribute to self-regulating action. Students are motivated for different reasons. Motivation is not synonymous with achievement, but a positive feeling of self-worth that is a strong motivational construct. Ames defines self-worth as "self-efficacy as an expectation or belief that one is capable of performing a specific task, organizing and carrying out required behaviors in a situation" (p. 412). All tasks are made important through the use of external rewards.

Ames (1990) cites the research of Bogiano as it relates to the effects of rewards and incentives on student motivation. It was discovered that reward was preferred to reasoning, punishment, and even noninterference and that adults preferred large rewards over small ones (p. 416). Ames concurs that use of extrinsic incentives can be effective motivators, but warns that if they are not designed to meet individual differences in interest, performance, and ability, then the 'hidden costs' of the rewards can be detrimental to motivation (p. 417)

Glasser (1990) in his work on what he deems to be the 'quality school' has created what he refers to as the control theory. This theory is based on the belief that, "no one can make anyone do anything--it is the job of the manager (teacher) to make it easy for the workers (students) to see a strong connection between what they are asked to do and what they believe to be worth doing." (p. 427) Glasser makes an industrial analogy between school and the workplace, stating that school should be made relevant and interesting because bored workers won't produce high quality work.

According to Glasser (1990) there are two different management styles; boss-management and lead-management. Boss-management style is based on coercion and lead-management on cooperative action. "Effective teachers manage students without coercion. Coercion begets coercion which turns the students into adversaries thus reducing the opportunity to motivate (p. 427)."

Glasser's control theory states that "all motivation comes from within ourselves and not from outside. However, what happens outside has a lot to do with what we choose to do, but the outside

event doesn't cause our behavior. All we get from the outside is information" (p. 432). An effective lead-manager will try to give workers the kind of information that will persuade them to do as directed because it is as much to the worker's benefit as it is to the manager's (p. 432). All humans are motivated by the basic needs of survival, love, power, fun, and freedom. The control theory states that humans try to control their own behavior so that what we choose to do is the most need-satisfying that we can do (p. 432).

A good lead-manager will create a situation of cooperative action which will allow the students to satisfy their need to belong and feel powerful, according to Glasser (1990). Most unmotivated students feel an alienation from the school. A sense of teamwork should be created in order for the students to feel important.

Shanker (1990) has adapted the principles of economic systems to the theories of student motivation. The free market theory (capitalism) and the theory of the planned or command economy (communism), according to Shanker, can be utilized in directing people toward action.

In a command economy, everyone is paid at the same rate and there is no need for individual economic incentives to get people to work. On the other hand, a market system allows people to be innovative. Incentives such as money, the desire to do a good job, to solve a difficult problem, or to gain respect of colleagues can move people into action. "Systems without financial incentives have not worked--a successful system must use all incentives" (p. 353).

According to Shanker (1990), in schools, incentives are lined up the wrong way. People are not rewarded for improving outcomes. The students have only one incentive--a diploma. "Incentives do work; they are a major motivator of the behavior of individuals and systems" (p. 355). Schools should be designed to use competition and teamwork to achieve established goals. Just as in a free market system, this will result in a high level of production.

The Back-to-Class Program

Germantown High School is a large suburban high school located in a fairly affluent area. Last year the administrators of the high school agreed to create a program which would address the

stated number one concern of the Germantown High faculty--school absenteeism. Germantown had a fairly high attendance rate which averaged out to be at 92 percent, but there was still room for improvement. The administrators agreed that the traditional, punitive attendance policy was not totally effective and started to investigate options. If the negative wasn't working, why not attempt to couple the negative with the positive? Using the key elements of the motivational theories previously surveyed, the Back-to-Class attendance program was formulated.

Back-to-Class is an incentive based program which is designed to reward excellent attendance. This program goes beyond the basic carrot (incentives/rewards) and stick (punishments) premise of the classical management theory by offering situations in which the higher-order needs of the student can be met. Both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are offered.

As expressed in Maslow and in Herzberg's theories, the drive to satisfy the needs of social affiliation, self-esteem, achievement, and recognition are strong motivators.

The Back-to-Class program provides the means for these needs to be met. Students with perfect attendance are allowed to select their next year's teachers which allows them to see a purpose to their action and to benefit from it as suggested by Ames (1990) and Glasser (1990). Students with good attendance and at least a "B" average are exempt from their exams. This not only gives them a purpose and a benefit, but it is a form of recognition and achievement which boosts their self-esteem.

At the inception of the program, goals were set for the students and for the school as a whole. Improved attendance became the student's individual goal as well as the goal of the school. An assembly was held in which the students were asked to help the school to attain the highest attendance average of any high school in the county system. The local pizza parlor donated a free pizza party to the first period class (homerooms were canceled in an attempt to reduce tardiness) with the best attendance rate each six weeks.

All of this combined, gave the students a sense of teamwork and cooperative action. They were working together as a class to beat the other classes or as a school to beat the other schools.

Their individual effort gave them self-worth while their group effort fostered feelings of belonging, responsibility, achievement, and recognition. This allowed their higher-order needs to be met. Glasser (1990) suggested that such cooperative action would be motivational.

In addition to the selection of teachers, exam exemption (which is board policy), and pizza parties, the students with good attendance were rewarded small prizes like reserved parking places, free admission to ball games, coupon books to local businesses, scholarships to selected seniors, and special activities were provided. Additionally, a bulletin board was placed outside of the attendance office graphing the attendance percentages so that students could watch the progress being made. Such incentives followed the beliefs of Shanker (1990) in that the students were being rewarded for improving outcomes.

Ames (1990) supports the belief that behavior can be directed through organized tasks and once this is accomplished, that desired behavior becomes consistent. The Back-to-School program makes attendance a focal point of the school. Students are working toward good attendance rather than the opposite. Once the students got in the pattern of attending school, they began to

get involved in more school activities and therefore became more committed to the school. Their sense of belonging was enhanced.

The Back-to-Class program also includes other factors. The stick or the punishment aspect of the program was not removed. Students still must face the consequences of their actions. Also, parents are contacted every day that their child is absent. This strong home/school communication allows all those concerned to work for the same goal.

The Results of Back-to-Class

After one year of implementation, the Back-to-Class program has had phenomenal results. The average attendance rate has risen to 96 percent, an overall increase of 4 percent (See appendix for detailed breakdown). Germantown accomplished its goal of having the highest attendance rate of any high school in the county during the second reporting period and has continued to hold that position.

Due to improved attendance and grades, nearly 1400 of the 2100 students were eligible for exam exemption during the first semester. Additionally, the number of students involved in extra-curricular activities increased.

Conclusion

All of the motivational theories surveyed show the common elements of the importance of the intrinsic sense of belonging and self-worth to motivation. Individuals need to feel a sense of achievement and are motivated by extrinsic acknowledgements of this achievement. The Back-to-Class program at Germantown High School is a concrete example of the power of the combination of the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators on student behavior. This may add credence to the old adage that, "you can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar."

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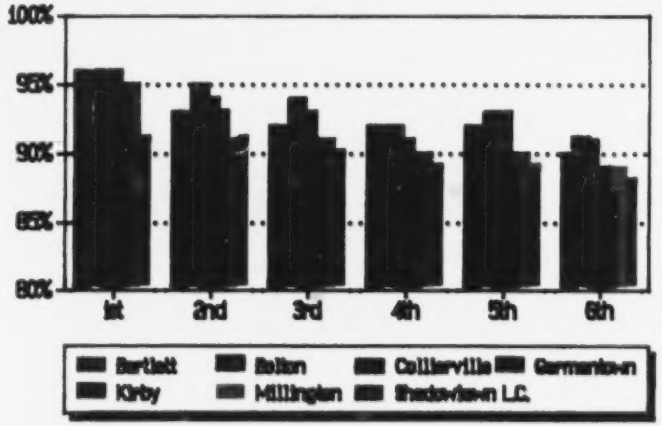
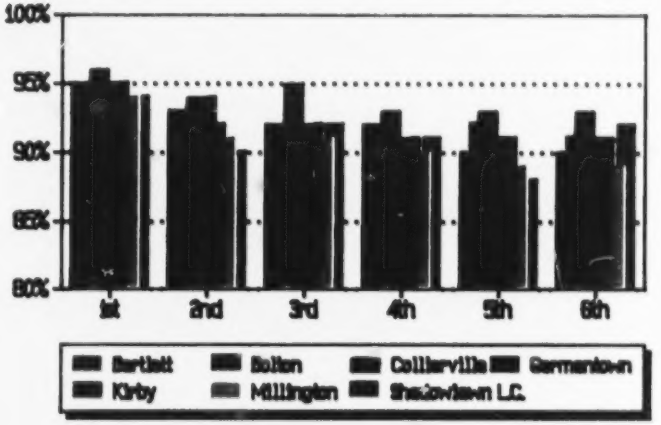
Appendix

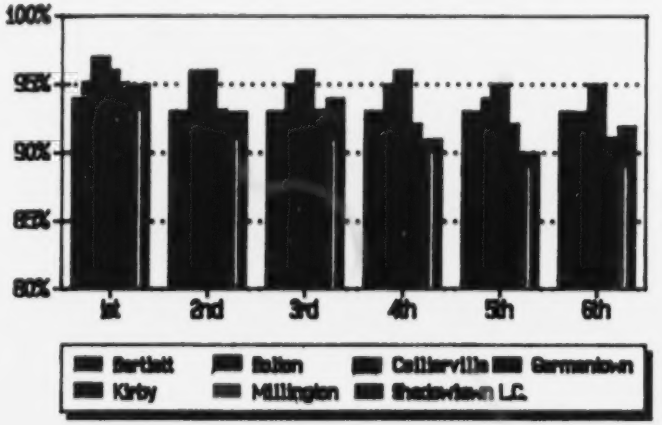
1988 Attendance Comparison



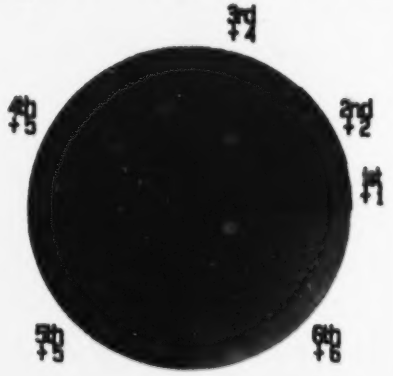
1989 Attendance Comparison



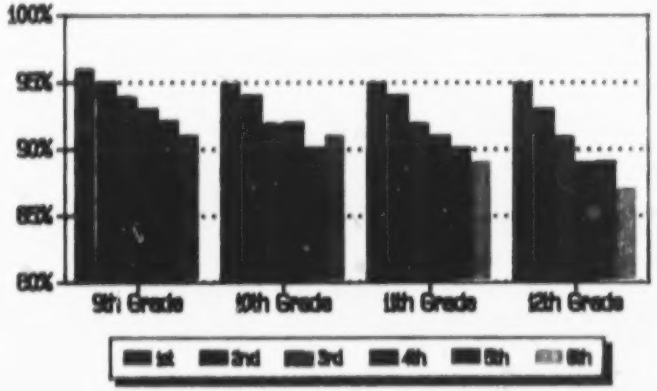
1990 Attendance Comparison



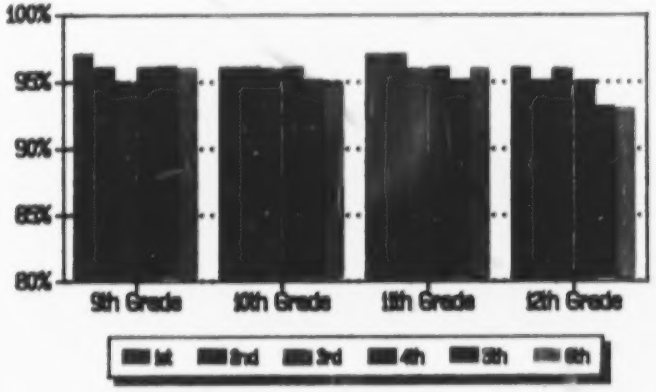
Changes in Attendance
Percentage for Germantown (1989-90)



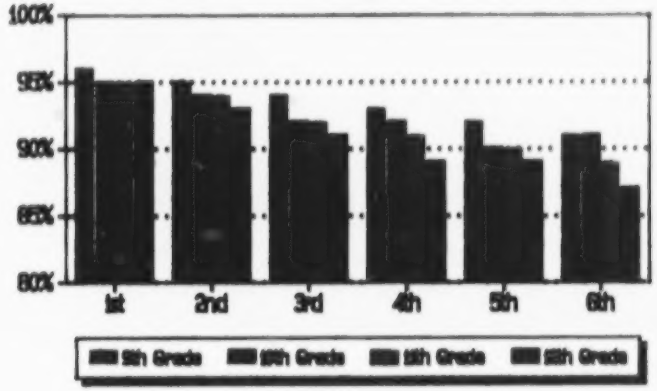
1989 Attendance Comparison of Class Breakdown for GHS



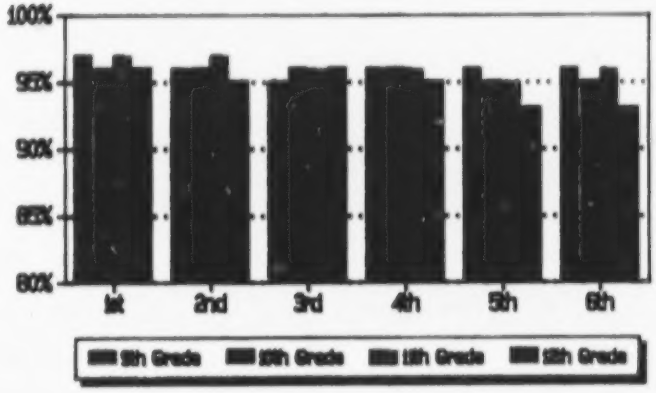
1990 Attendance Comparison of Class Breakdown for GHS

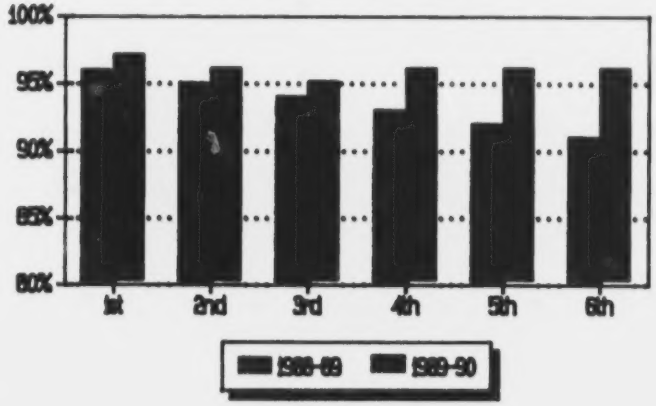


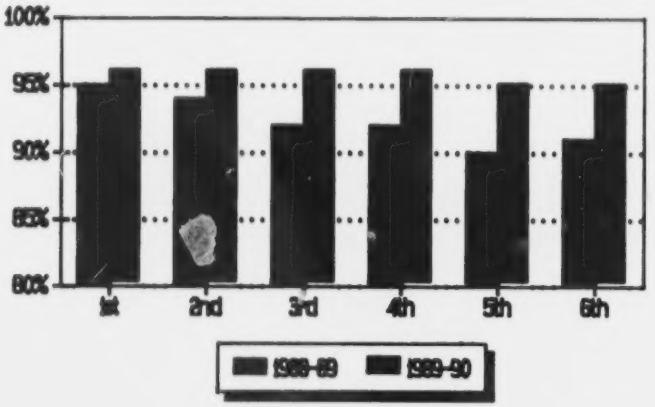
1989 Attendance Comparison of Class Breakdown for GHS

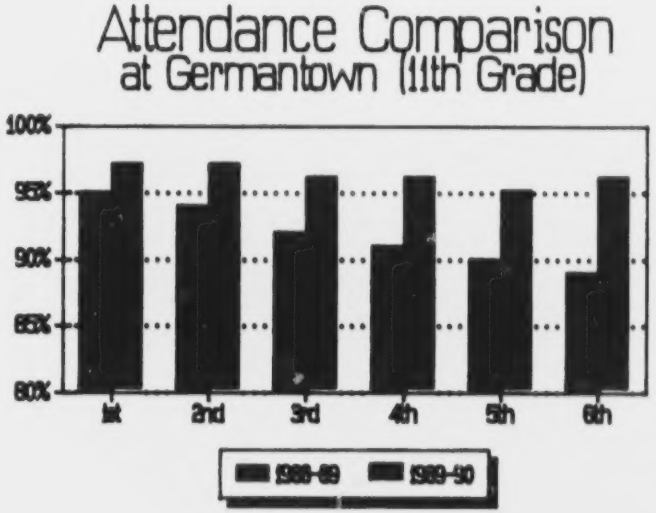


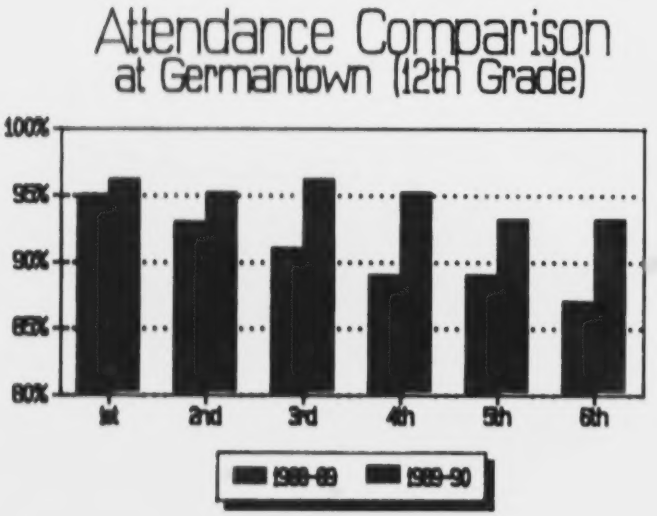
1990 Attendance Comparison of Class Breakdown for GHS




Attendance Comparison
at Germantown (9th Grade)
100%
95%
90%
85%
80%
1st
2nd
3rd
4th
5th
6th
1988-89
1989-90


Attendance Comparison
at Germantown (10th Grade)
100%
95%
90%
85%
80%
1st
2nd
3rd
4th
5th
6th
1988-89
1989-90


Attendance Comparison
at Germantown (11th Grade)
100%
95%
90%
85%
80%
1st
2nd
3rd
4th
5th
6th
1988-89
1989-90


Attendance Comparison
at Germantown (12th Grade)
100%
95%
90%
85%
80%
1st
2nd
3rd
4th
5th
6th
1988-89
1989-90